

## CLAIMS

We claim:

- 5        1. An advertising method for inserting a background reference to a stored advertisement into an end user communication message in a communications network, said method comprising the steps of:
  - receiving an end user communication message at a first site on a communications network;
- 10      inserting into said end user communication message a background reference to a stored advertisement; and
- transmitting said end user communication message with said background reference to a second site on the communications network.
- 15      2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said background reference is operative for enabling background tiling of said advertisement at said second site.
- 20      3. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said end user communication message includes an Internet e-mail message.
4. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said end user communication message includes a public posting.
- 25      5. The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a step of transforming said end user communication message into hypertext markup language (HTML), and wherein said transmitting step includes transmitting said end user communication message in a web-based e-mail system to a web browser at said second site.

6. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said transmitting step includes transmitting said end user communication message in a post office protocol (POP) format.  
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7. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said inserting step includes selecting the stored advertisement based on user demographic information.
8. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said inserting step includes selecting the stored advertisement based on advertisement exposure for a pool of advertisers.  
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9. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said inserting step includes inserting a hypertext markup language (HTML) background reference tag into the end user communication message.  
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10. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said stored advertisement is stored at the first site.
- 20 11. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said stored advertisement is stored at a site remote from said second site, wherein said background reference includes a file address remote from said second site.
12. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said stored advertisement is a graphical image file.  
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13. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said inserting step includes:  
determining whether said end user communication message is in a format capable of operatively accepting said background reference; and  
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converting said end user communication message into a format  
capable of operatively accepting said background reference  
responsive to determining that said message is not in a  
format capable of operatively accepting said background  
reference.

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14. The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said determining step includes a step of determining whether said end user communication message is in multipurpose Internet mail extensions (MIME) format.
15. The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said converting step includes a step of converting said end user communication message into multipurpose Internet mail extensions (MIME) format.
16. The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
  - first determining whether said end user communication message in said receiving step is in a format capable of operatively accepting a background reference;
  - second determining whether said end user communication message contains a standard generalized markup language (SGML) part responsive to determining that said end user communication message is in a format capable of operatively accepting a background reference in said first determining step; and
  - adding an SGML part to said end user communication message responsive to determining that said end user communication message does not contain an SGML part;
17. The method as claimed in claim 16, wherein said SGML part includes hypertext markup language (HTML).

18. The method as claimed in claim 16, further comprising the steps of:  
third determining whether said end user communication message  
already contains a background reference responsive to  
determining that said end user communication message is  
in a format capable of operatively accepting a background  
reference in said second determining step; and  
inserting a background reference responsive to determining that  
said end user communication message does not contain a  
background reference in said third determining step.
19. The method as claimed in claim 18, further comprising the steps of:  
fourth determining whether a configuration enables an existing  
background reference to be overwritten responsive to  
determining in said third determining step that said end user  
communication message already contains a background  
reference; and  
overwriting a background reference responsive to determining in  
said fourth determining step that the configuration enables  
the existing background reference to be overwritten.
20. The method as claimed in claim 15, further comprising a step of adding an  
SGML part to said end user communication message converted into  
MIME format.